

ISLAM

Abdul Latif Al Hoad

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What is Islam?

"Islam" is an Arabic word meaning "submission." The word "Muslim" is also from an Arabic word, and means "one who submits." So Islam is submission to the will of Allah (the word the Muslim uses for God), which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over a twenty-three year period, and recorded in the Koran, the Holy Book. Muslims believe that everything in the Holy Koran is the direct word of God, and must therefore be obeyed.

A "prophet" is a messenger sent by God to give guidance to humankind.

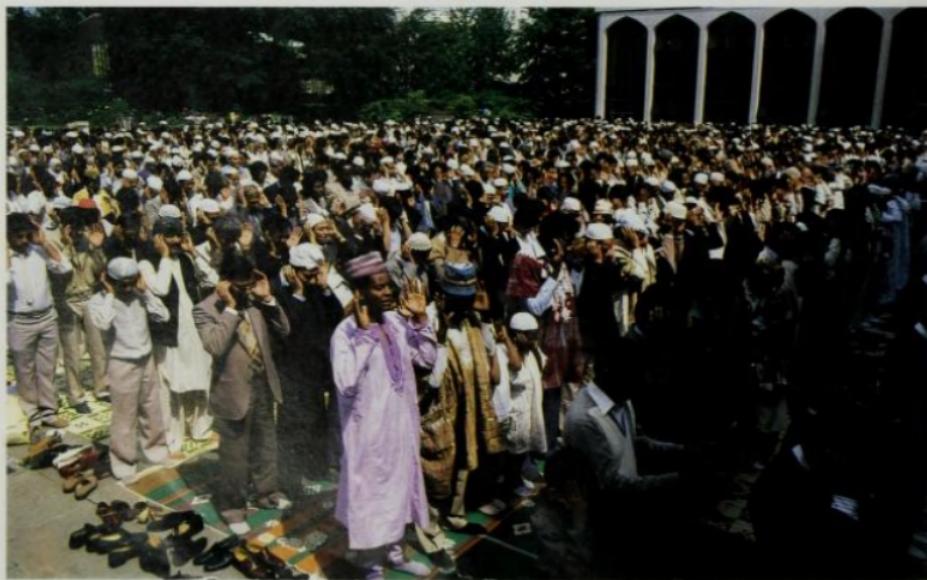
Followers of Islam recognize many prophets including some such as Moses and Abraham who are recognized by both Jews and Christians. But they believe that the last and greatest of the prophets is Muhammad.

Islam is not only a belief but a complete way of life.

Who are the Muslims?

It has been estimated that there are between 800 and 900 million Muslims in the world. Although Islam has its roots in Arabia, since Allah revealed

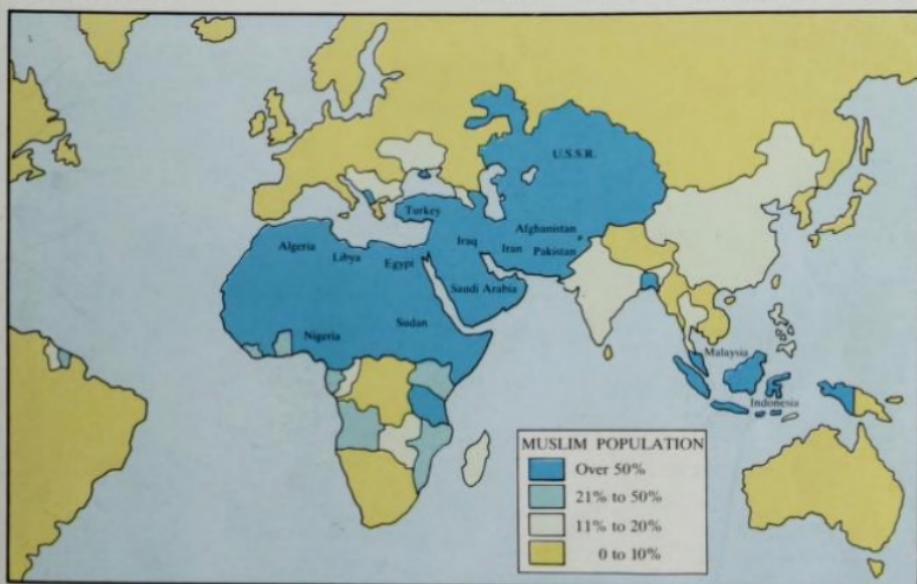
Outside the Regent's Park mosque in London, Muslims of all nationalities pray together.



his message to Muhammad in a desert mountain outside Mecca, a Muslim is not necessarily an Arab. Arabs make up only about one sixth of the world's Muslim population. There are followers of Islam in almost every country of the world. Many Muslims live in the West. In Britain there are about two million Muslims, and the mosque in Regent's Park in London is one of the largest in the world.

Muslims believe that all men are equal in the sight of Allah, regardless of color, race or rank. There is no difference between rich or poor, black or white.

Map showing the distribution of Muslims throughout the world.



How it all began

Muhammad was born in Mecca in approximately 570. His parents died when he was very young and he was brought up by his grandfather, and later by his uncle, Abu Talib, who was a merchant.

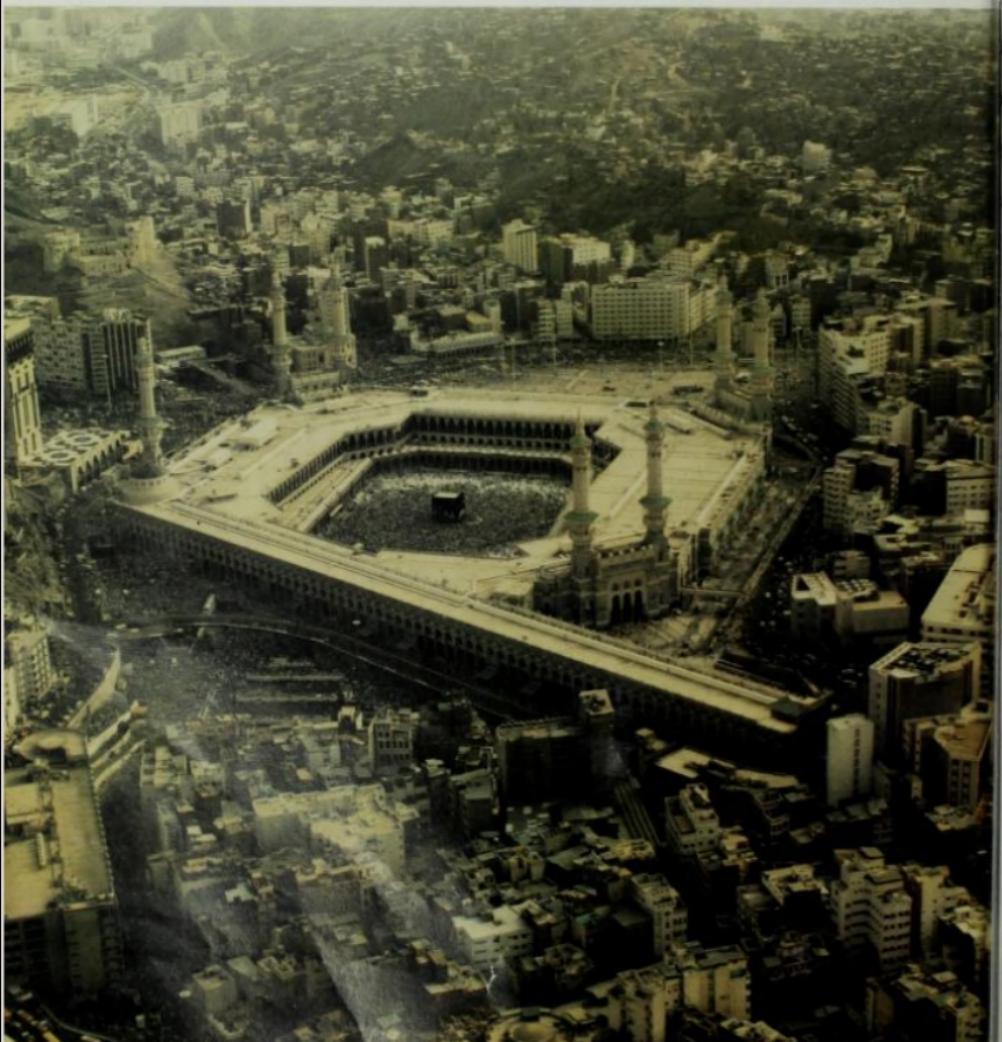
When he grew up, he was first a camel-driver and eventually became a trader. His honest dealings earned him the title "al-Amin," which means "the trustworthy." He later married his employer, a rich widow, named Khadija. Muhammad was twenty-five at the time and his new wife was forty. Despite the age difference, the marriage was happy and successful, and lasted twenty-six years.

Muhammad and some of his fellow citizens were concerned about the state of religion in Mecca. The people worshipped many gods. Even though Mecca had a famous shrine — the *Ka'aba*, traditionally built by Abraham for the worship of the one God — they

filled it with 360 idols of stone, clay or wood to which they and visiting traders made sacrifices.

Muhammad was in the habit of

The Holy Mosque in Mecca, which is the center of annual pilgrimage.



retiring alone to a cave on Mount Hira to meditate and one day, when he was forty years old, he heard a voice saying to him "Read." Since he could neither read nor write, Muhammad replied, "Alas, I cannot read." The voice repeated "Read," and once more Muhammad answered, "Alas, I cannot read." The voice then said, "Read, in the name of the Lord, who created man from a clot of blood. Read." As Muhammad left the cave in terror, he heard the voice echoing all around saying, "O, Muhammad, thou art Allah's messenger and I am Gabriel." Looking up he saw the Angel Gabriel in the likeness of a man, bathed in bright light and filling the sky. The vision faded and Muhammad returned home. [Khadija was convinced that he was to be the Prophet that the Jews were awaiting. Over the next twenty-three years Muhammad was an enthusiastic and obedient messenger, and recited the commands the Angel delivered to him from Allah. He had to recite them because he could not write them. They came to be known as "the Readings," in Arabic, "*Al-Qur'an*" (the Koran).]

At the end of the third year of his ministry, Muhammad was instructed to "Arise and warn" (Sura 74, the Cloaked One), and he began to preach in public about the evils of false gods. (Previously he had spoken only to friends and relatives.) He and his disciples were ridiculed and persecuted

but he continued to preach.

In the end, Muhammad and his followers had to leave Mecca. This was in 622. This event is known as the *hijra*, and marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar, as at this point Muhammad established the first Muslim community—in Medina. The number of his followers increased and this success angered the people of Mecca, who sent an army to defeat Muhammad. But the attempt was foiled. Muhammad gained the victory. He returned to Mecca in 630. The people turned to Islam and the idols were banished from the *Ka'aba*. The movement was now very strong and was able to survive the death of Muhammad in 632. Abu Bakr became the leader, the first Caliph.

The cave on Mount Hira, said to be where Muhammad went to meditate.





The Five Pillars

The most important demonstrations of faith are referred to as the “Five Pillars of Islam,” the *Arkan al-din*.

The First Pillar

The First Pillar is the declaration of belief in Allah, the one God. This is, by far, the most important command.

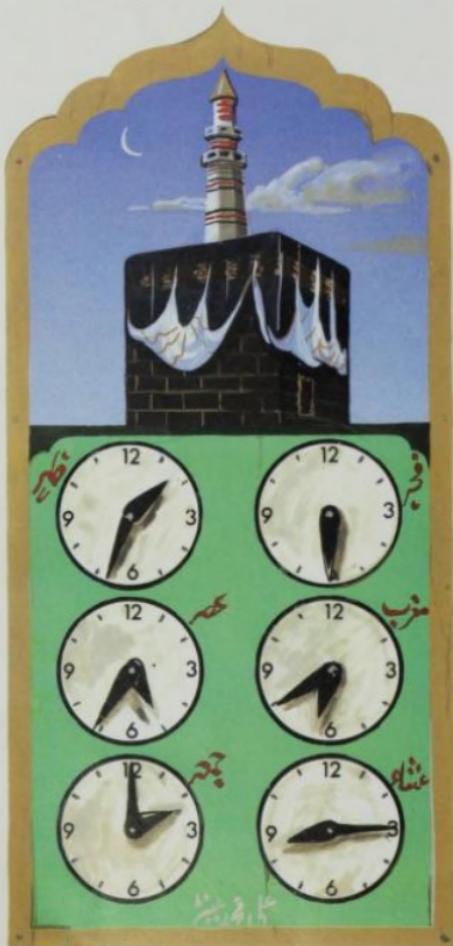
Speaking the following words in front of at least two Muslim witnesses is how one becomes a Muslim: “I witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his servant and Prophet.” This is known as the “*shahadah*,” and must be recited aloud and correctly once in a lifetime with full understanding and commitment of the

Below The words of the *shahadah* are written on the Saudi Arabian flag. They are the declaration of faith.



Left Early Persian paintings depicted Caliphs as powerful figures. The Persians did not agree with the Islamic prohibition against painting human figures.

heart. These words, in Arabic, are to be seen above the sword on the Saudi Arabian flag.



Five clocks outside the Sama Masjid mosque in India show the times of daily prayer. The sixth clock is for Friday prayers, which are communal.

The Second Pillar

The next most important duty for a Muslim is to pray five times daily (*salat*). Interrupting work and pleasure several times a day reminds the Muslim of the need to praise Allah and to submit to his will. Prayers are said at set times. In certain circumstances the prayer may be said after the allotted time, but never before. This is determined by the position of the sun. If a prayer is delayed, it must be said before the time of the next prayers. The prayers have special names, which are:

Fajr The Dawn Prayer (when it is possible to distinguish the black thread of the horizon from the white one of the sky).

Dhuhr The Midday Prayer (when the sun is directly overhead).

Asr The Mid-afternoon Prayer (when the sun is half-way down, or when a stick casts a shadow its own length).

Maghrib The Sunset Prayer (when the sun disappears over the horizon).

Isha About an hour and a half later.

Each prayer consists of two or more sections, each section known as a *raka'a*. Passages from the Koran are recited in Arabic, and certain ritual movements are performed.

A ritual washing of hands, head, face, body and feet is obligatory before

each prayer. The Koran places great stress on cleanliness, and even gives detailed instructions on how to wash.

The *muezzin* calls the people to prayer from the top of the minaret of the mosque. The human voice is always the instrument that summons to prayer. The prayers are said facing toward the *Ka'aba* in Mecca. This direction, the *qibla*, is marked in the mosque by a niche in the wall, which is known as the *mihrab*. Muslims must remove their shoes before entering a mosque, so that dust from the street is not carried into a holy place.

On Fridays there is a special prayer, known as the *Salat al-Jum'ah*, at midday. Everybody collects together in the mosque for communal prayers. Friday is known as the *Jum'ah* — the "gathering" — and is the Muslim equivalent of the weekend.

When a person is traveling, prayers may be shortened and even joined together, for example, the *Dhuhr* to the *Asr* or the *Asr* to the *Maghrib*.

For Muslims, prayer involves several ritual movements, which accompany the recitation of passages from the Koran, in Arabic. These pictures (below and right) show a Muslim businessman interrupting his work to pray.



The Third Pillar

Giving alms, or *zakat*, is the Third Pillar of Islam. The Koran says that all Muslims should give part of their wealth to "orphans, the needy, the traveler and those who ask." This should be 2.5 percent of their income.

The Fourth Pillar

The Fourth Pillar of Islam is fasting (*sawm*) during the month of *Ramadhan*. It is a very strict fast since it is forbidden to eat, drink or smoke between the hours of sunrise and sunset. This can put enormous pressures on people living in hot climates when *Ramadhan* occurs in the hottest part of the year. In 1986 *Ramadhan* started on May 9, but since Islam uses the moon's phases to measure its months, this date moves



Above Muslims must give alms.

Below Muslims gather at a mosque for Friday prayers.





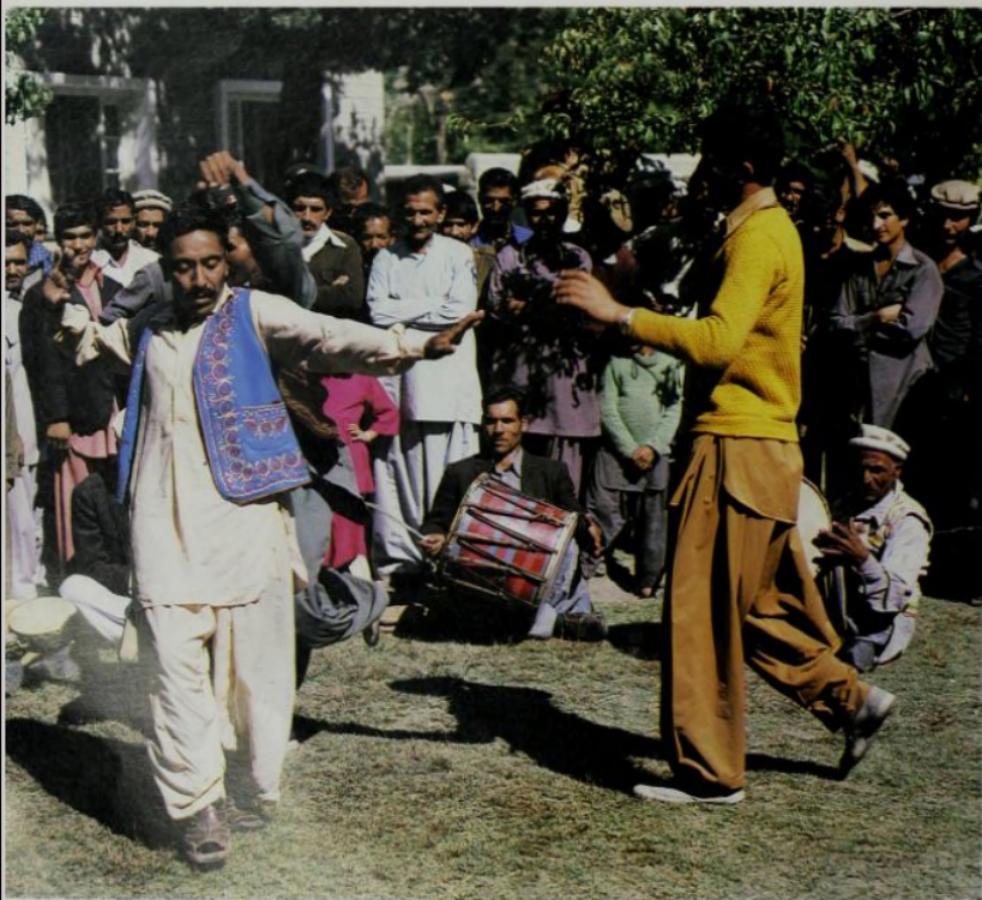
A Muslim family are waiting to break their fast during Ramadhan at the al Hussein mosque, which is in Iraq. They will all sit down to eat at sundown.

forward by twelve days each year.

Prince Sultan bin Sulman, the first Arab and Muslim to be part of one of the American space missions, fasted during his last month of training and for his first day in space, in spite of the physically demanding program he had to follow. He also read the Koran in its entirety while orbiting in space!

At the end of *Ramadhan* there is the great festival of *Eid al-Fitr* — The Festival of Breaking the Fast. It is a period of joy and celebration, and lasts for four days. It is a family festival, and presents are exchanged.

The Eid al-Fitr festival following Ramadhan, is a time of rejoicing.



The Fifth Pillar

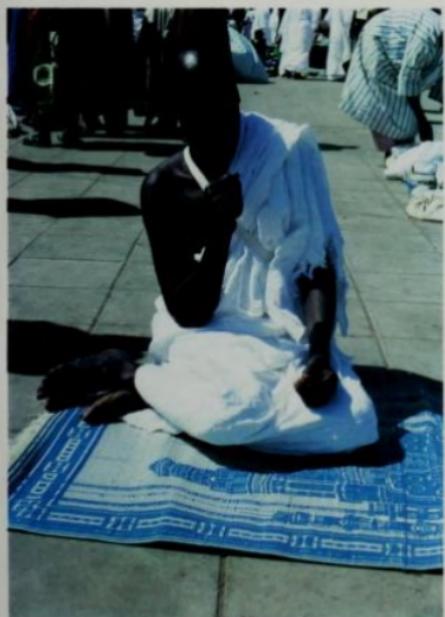
Allah, the Most High says:

*And proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage . . .
they will come unto thee on foot and on every lean
camel; they will come from every deep ravine.*

Sura 22, the Pilgrimage

Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim should attempt once in his or her lifetime, but only if this undertaking does not involve hardship for the family. This is the only Pillar that is not compulsory. Over

*A pilgrim on the Hajj at Mecca, wearing
two lengths of white cotton, and seated on a
prayer mat.*



*The markers, which are 9.5km (6 miles)
from Mecca. These act as a signal to the
pilgrim that he or she has now entered upon
the Hajj.*

two million Muslims, many of whom have to travel long distances, make their way to Mecca every year. It is the world's largest annual spiritual gathering.

Since time immemorial, Mecca has been a place of pilgrimage because of its association with Abraham and possibly with Adam before that. Muhammad, the Prophet, was born there and his mission was first revealed to him near there on Mount Hira. Allah incorporated *Hajj* into the Islamic faith.

When the pilgrims are about 9.5km (6 miles) from the sacred city, they must wash. Men put on two lengths

of white cotton — the *ihram*; they must be bare-headed and they usually wear sandals. Women dress simply and must cover their heads, but need not be veiled. The purpose of this is to symbolize the equality of all, whether rich or poor, in the sight of Allah. During this time, pilgrims are forbidden to cut their hair or nails, to use perfume, have sexual relations, hunt, or even pick wild flowers (which would mean destroying Allah's work).

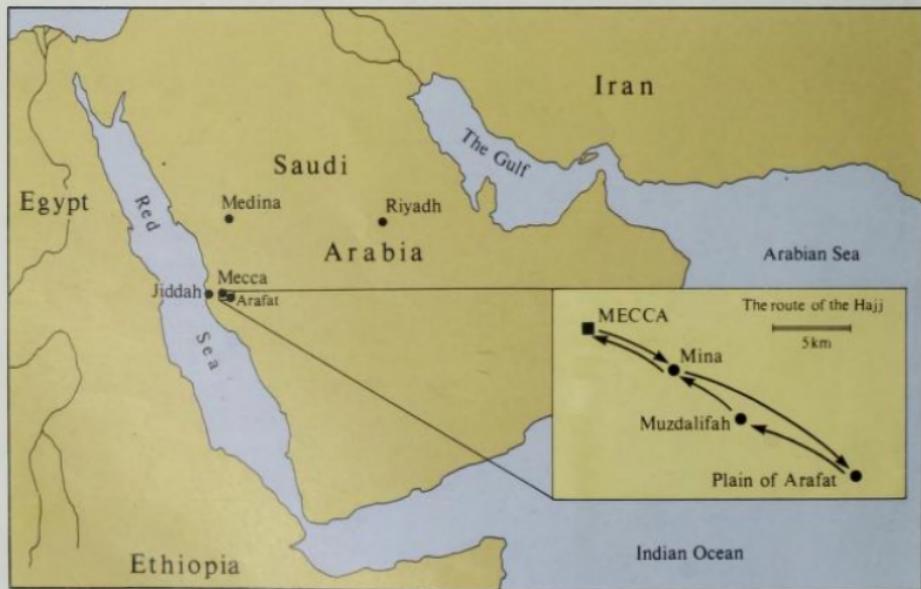
Toward the center of the sacred mosque in Mecca is the *Ka'aba*, toward which all Muslims turn their faces in the daily prayers. This is a stone structure, about 15m high (48ft), 11m wide (35ft), and 16m long (52ft).

It is draped in a black silk cover. The *Ka'aba* is believed to have been built by Abraham (although it has been rebuilt several times since). The Black Stone — probably a meteorite — which is in a corner is believed to be part of the original structure and to date back to the time of Adam.

On arrival in Mecca, at the start of the pilgrimage, the pilgrim must:

- Walk seven times round the *Ka'aba* in an anti-clockwise direction. Some try to touch or kiss the Black Stone as they pass.

Map of Saudi Arabia showing the places that must be visited during the Hajj.



● Run seven times between the hills of as-Safa and al-Marwah. This is done in memory of Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, Abraham's son and the ancestor of the Arab people. She ran distractedly seven times between these two hills in search of water. When she returned she found a spring gushing at Ishmael's feet, and water has flowed from it ever since. It is known as the Well of Zam-Zam.

● Go to the plain of Arafat. This is 9 km (6 miles) from Mecca. The pilgrims spend the whole afternoon standing in prayer in the open air, glorifying Allah.

At the beginning and at the end of the Hajj, pilgrims must walk seven times around the Ka'aba in an anti-clockwise direction. Some kiss or touch the Black Stone, which is believed to be part of the original structure.



- Proceed to Muzdalifah, another open plain, where the pilgrim must gather seventy small pebbles.
- Go to the village of Mina where the ritual of stoning the devils takes place. Stones are thrown at three pillars to commemorate Abraham's rejection of Satan.
- Sacrifice an animal — a sheep or a goat — although the pilgrim is not required to slaughter the animal personally. There are butchers who will do this, store the meat and give it to the poor.

Hajjis often decorate their houses with paintings showing details of their journey to Mecca.

- Go seven times round the *Ka'aba* once again.

The pilgrimage is then completed, although many people combine this with a visit to Medina to see the Prophet's tomb. Those who have completed the pilgrimage are entitled to call themselves *Hajjis*.

The *Eid al-Adha* — The Festival of Sacrifice — marks the time of the end of the pilgrimage. It lasts for four days and is celebrated very much in the same way as the *Eid al-Fitr*. It is a time of rejoicing throughout the Muslim world, a time for charitable donations to be made and the exchange of gifts to take place between family and friends.



Customs

Birth

From the moment a Muslim child is born, he or she is a true Muslim and the words

*La illah illa Allah wa Muhammad Abdhuwa
rassoulu hu*

should be the first the baby hears. This means "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his servant and Prophet." There is no other initiation ceremony. The Koran makes no mention of circumcision although this is usually carried out in hospital soon

after birth. In some Muslim countries it occurs later and becomes a cause for celebration and feasting, but it is not compulsory.

The seventh day after birth is the one recommended for the naming of the child. This is called "Aqiqah." The child's hair will be cut and a sacrifice of two sheep or goats will be made if the child is a boy — one if it is a girl — and the meat is given to the poor. The weight of the hair in gold and silver may be given as alms, although this only occurs in some Muslim countries.

A Muslim child having its head shaved during the Aqiqah, or naming ceremony. This occurs seven days after birth.





Marriage

The Koran allows a man to have up to four wives, who must all be treated equally. In fact, very few men have more than one wife. The marriage ceremony is very simple. Each partner agrees in front of two Muslim witnesses to marry, but there are elaborate ceremonies accompanying this simple declaration.

Marriages are often arranged by parents and older relatives, or after introductions by brothers or sisters. The Koran says that no woman need marry against her will. In practice, arranged marriages work very well. The woman must be given a gift (dowry) of money or jewelery by the man, which is hers to keep. She is also allowed to keep her own money and wages for herself as a working wife. She

A Muslim bride often wears beautiful, elaborately embroidered clothes.

retains her own name, as her father is still responsible for her and will remain responsible for her throughout her life.

Divorce

Everything possible must be done to make a marriage work. If this is impossible, then divorce is allowed although it is frowned upon and should only be a last resort. Once the decision has been made, however, divorce may be obtained quickly and easily. The wife is entitled to remain for three months in the family home if she wishes, and during that time her husband must support her. She is allowed to keep her dowry, but once the divorce is final she can expect no



An Egyptian farmer stands outside his home with his two wives. A Muslim man may have up to four wives, each of whom he must treat equally.

further support, unlike some of her counterparts in the West. She becomes the responsibility of her father again.

Death

Death is regarded by Muslims as a release from the troubles of this life, and on hearing of someone's death it is customary to say "Allah Karim" — "from Allah we came and to him we shall return." This refers to the Last Judgment, when all Muslims believe that their lives will be reviewed and they will have to answer for their deeds. Either they will enter Paradise where there are:

... gardens underneath which rivers flow ...

or they will become:

... dwellers of the Fire (and will) cry out unto the dwellers of the gardens: Pour onto us some water or some of that wherewith Allah provided you. They say: Lo! Allah hath forbidden both to unbelievers.

Sura VII, the Heights

Burial

After ritual washing, the corpse is wrapped in at least three white sheets and laid, without ceremony except for a few prayers, on the right side with the face turned toward Mecca, in a simple grave at least 2m (6ft) deep. The grave has no marker or headstone. Departure from this custom is contrary to the teaching of the Koran.

Some say that the grave should be deep enough for the dead person to sit up without his or her head appearing above ground, in order to answer the questions at the Last Judgment.

The saying of a prayer is the only ceremony at a Muslim funeral.



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The Koran

The Koran was revealed to Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years and is regarded by Muslims as the word of God and his final revelation to humankind. It was recited from memory and written down by others on a variety of materials — pieces of bone, clay tablets, leaves, etc. — and these were stored in the house of Muhammad's second wife Ayesha. More important, however, the whole Koran was stored in the memories of his followers who, like Muhammad, could recite it by heart. Many people can perform this feat today, even young children. Forty followers — the "Revelation writers" — were assigned to record the Koran. After the death of Muhammad many of his followers were killed in battle and this so concerned the people that all those who could recite the Koran were called together and an authoritative version made. Copies were dispatched to all parts of the Muslim Empire. Since that time the Koran has been unchanged. Not even a comma has been altered. Any translation of the Koran is viewed with disapproval by Muslims, who insist that the true meaning can only be realized from the Arabic. A Muslim

Left Arabic calligraphy taken from the Koran will often form a roadside sculpture.



Some Muslims recite the complete text of the Koran from memory.

always tries to learn Arabic even if it is not his or her native language.

The Relationship between the Koran, the Torah and the Gospels

He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scriptures with truth, confirming that which was before it, even as he revealed the Torah and the Gospels.

Sura III, the Family of Imran

The Torah is the revelation of God's will to the Hebrew priests — the Mosaic or



Copies of the Koran are often elaborately decorated. Muslims try to read it in Arabic.

Jewish law — and is made up of the first five books of the Old Testament.

The *Gospels* are the part of the Christian New Testament that deals with the life and teachings of Jesus. They were written in Greek at various periods after the death of Christ and originally numbered more than those that were finally selected. Saint

Athenesius first named the four *Gospels* read today in A.D. 367. Muslims attach importance to these holy books of the Christians and the Jews insofar as they have both been confirmed by the Koran.

The Koran is half prose, half poetry and contains language of great power and beauty. It is particularly impressive when read aloud. It is the religious basis of Islam and also a complete set of rules for daily living and the organization of society.

Islam's Relationship with Christianity and Judaism

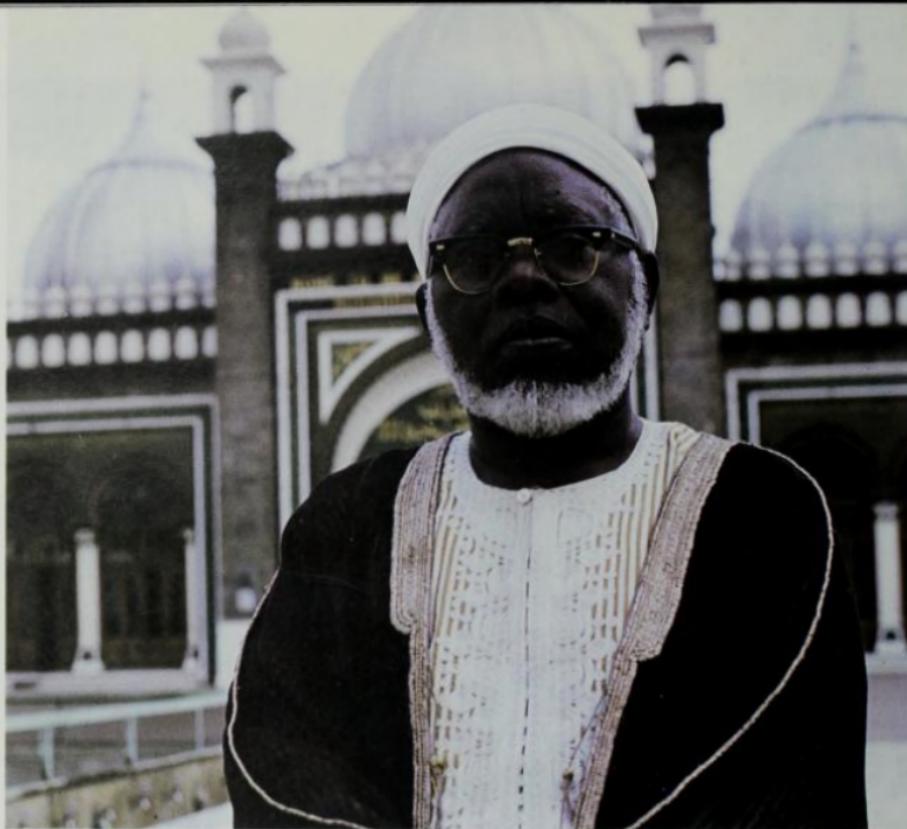
Islam, Judaism and Christianity are united in their belief in the one God.

At the time of the birth of Muhammad, there were Jews and Christians living in Mecca, and also idolators — people who worshipped "false gods." Muhammad was one of the *haneefy-yah* — those who searched for the right way, and who were neither

Jew nor Christian. The Koran refers to the latter as the "People of the Book." It is important to understand that Muslims believe in the prophets of the *Torah*, and the Old Testament, such as Moses and Abraham. They honor Jesus, but only as one of many prophets. They do not believe he is the Son of God. Muslims also believe that God will judge everyone at the end of

Muslim children reading the Koran. It is the religious basis of Islam and gives detailed instructions and guidelines on all aspects of life.





Muslims appoint an imam as guardian of a mosque. An imam is also the leader of the prayers.

time, a belief shared by Christians. Followers of Islam believe that Christians and Jews introduced corruption and error into the original revelation granted to them by God.

There are many differences in practice and belief, one of the most important being that Judaism has rabbis and Christianity has priests and

ministers to guide believers. Islam has none of these. It is true that sometimes a man is appointed guardian of a mosque — the *imam* — but he has no position of influence, and is not regarded as a “holy” man. He will also lead the prayers.

There is a group of very learned men called the *ulama*, who are respected throughout the Muslim world. They are often called upon to settle differences that arise in the interpretation of the Koran or *Shariah* Law.

The Spread of Islam

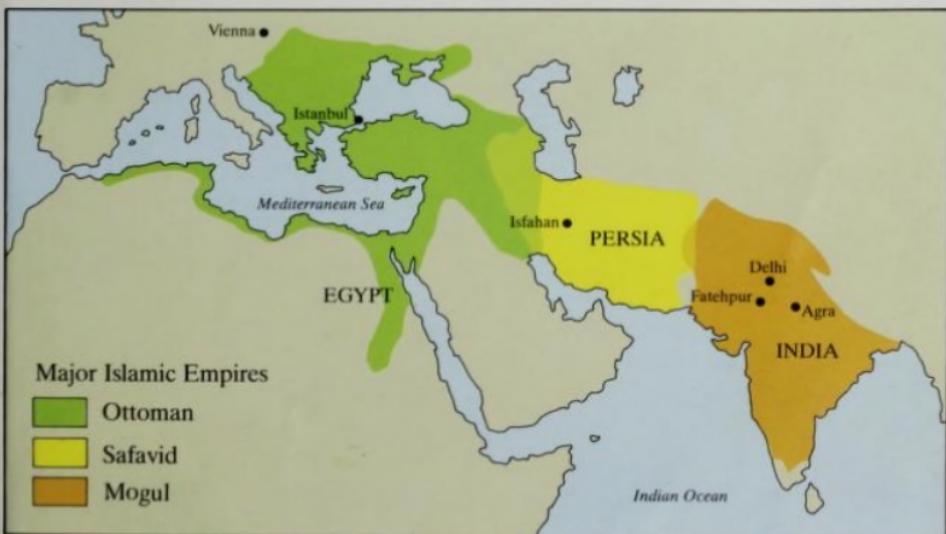
After the death of Muhammad, Abu Bakr became the new Caliph. By that time most of Arabia had converted to Islam. Muhammad had dreamed of conquering the whole world for Islam, and within one hundred years of his death a huge area was under Muslim rule. His followers had carried the faith into Syria, Iraq, Jerusalem and then farther west into Egypt and North Africa. Christians in the conquered territories were allowed to practice their own religion but, as non-Muslims, they were not allowed to be in the army, and were subjected to protection taxes. The spread of Islam outward from Mecca continued

rapidly and by 732 Muslims occupied all of North Africa and all of Spain and Portugal. Not long afterward they reached Tours, which is only about 160km (100 miles) from Paris. But the armies of Islam were defeated by Charles Martel at Poitiers and forced to retreat. Christian Europe was largely unaffected although Spain remained under Muslim influence for centuries.

By the tenth century the three main centers of Arab civilization were Baghdad, Cairo and Cordoba. Science, literature and the arts flourished.

But that was not the end of the spread of Islam. Later the message of Muhammad was taken south to

A map showing the spread of the Islamic empires.



Nigeria and the Sudan, and by the thirteenth century it reached China and Southeast Asia. Later, the message was often spread by travelers and merchants.

Constantinople, the Christian center of the Byzantine Empire, resisted the spread of Islam, but in 1453 it fell to the Muslims and was renamed Istanbul.

By the seventeenth century a considerable part of the known world consisted of wealthy, powerful and highly sophisticated Muslim empires — the Ottomans in Turkey, the

Safavids in Iran and the Moguls in India. These were far more advanced than any comparable state in Europe.

World War I (1914–18) saw the end of the Ottoman Empire, while the power of the Safavids was considerably weakened during the eighteenth century. The Mogul Empire came increasingly under the influence of the British, who remained in India as rulers until 1947.

An early painting depicting the invasion of India by the Mogul forces.



The Divisions of Islam

There are no sects or divisions in Islam, strictly speaking. There can only be the worship of the one true God in the manner laid down in the Koran, the *Hadith* and the *Sunna*. The *Hadith* are the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which are often referred to as the "Traditions," and recorded by his observers. The *Sunna* is the way, or example of the Prophet Muhammad, recorded by those who observed him during his lifetime. These ways are

firmly adhered to by all true believers. In 1736, a learned and devout Sheikh named Abdal Wahhab called upon all Muslims to return to the true observance of *Muwahadeen* — the belief in one God. He insisted that the Muslim was wandering away from the true Islam of the Koran, *Hadith* and the *Sunna*. His teachings found favor with the nation, and later, when Ibn Saud unified the area of what is now the

The Hadith, known as the "Traditions," is based on the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. These were recorded by observers during the Prophet's lifetime.



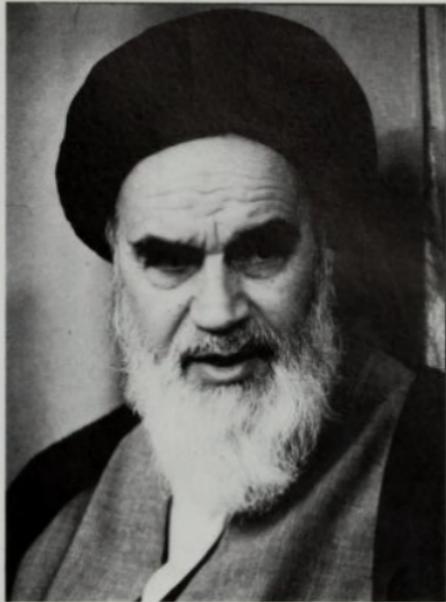


Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this revival was adopted by the whole kingdom. The people of Saudi Arabia are sometimes referred to as *Wahhabis*, although they do not approve of this and the term should not be used.

Throughout the world today, the traditional followers of the message of Islam are known as Sunnites, the followers of the path shown by Muhammad with the help of Allah, recorded in the *Sunna*. Saudi Arabia could be called a Sunnite country.

The Koran and the *Sunna* also make up the sources of Islamic law known as the *Shariah* ("path"), which is the law that Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia follow. There are four schools of thought within the Islamic system of law (*Fiqh*), and the rules that each school lays down differ in some respects from the others. These rules deal with all aspects of life, and any variations are slight. These schools of thought are called *Hanafi*, *Hanbali*, *Maliki* and *Shafii*, and although they are sometimes believed to be different sects of Islam, they are actually the same.

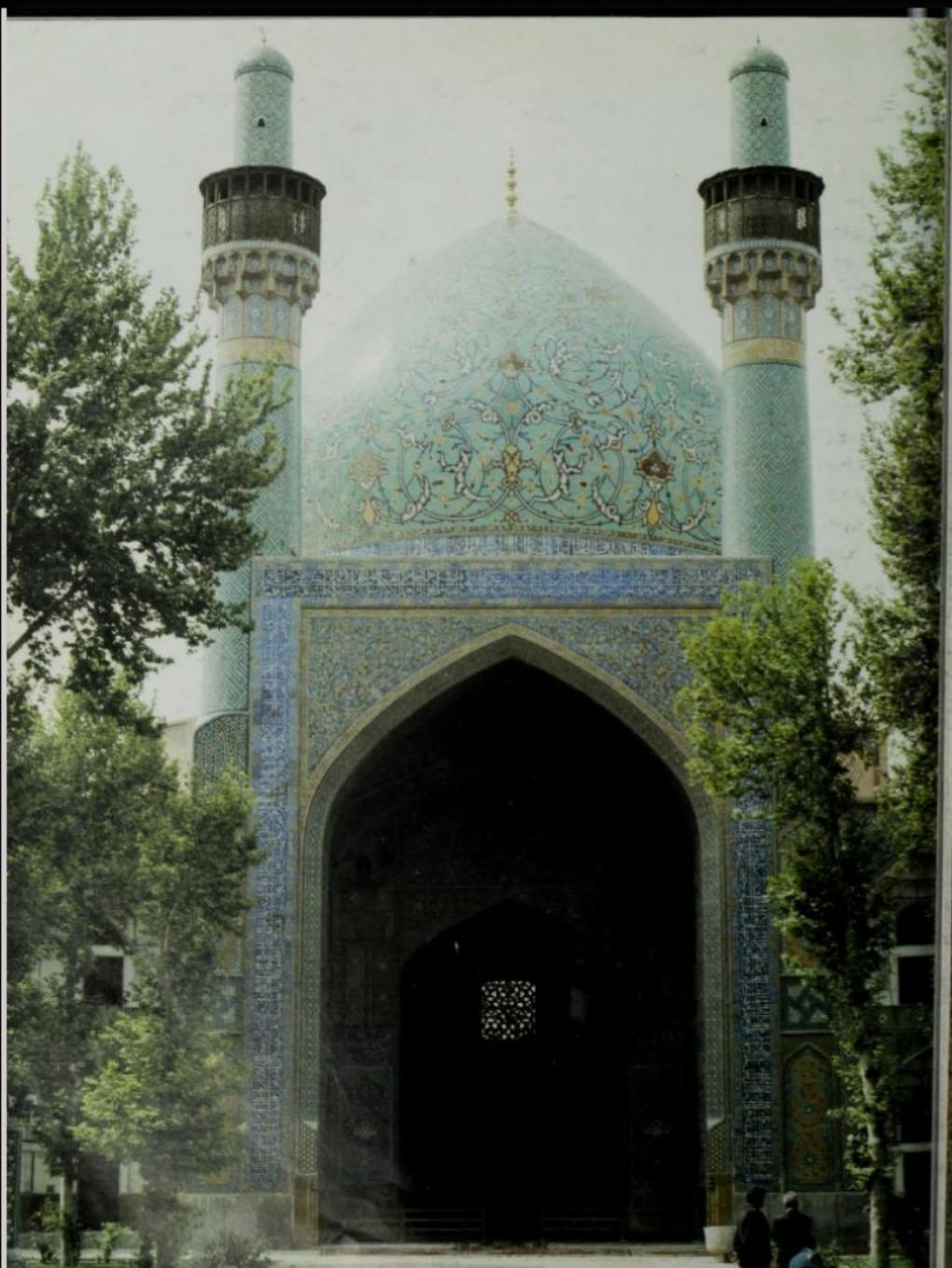
There is a grouping of Muslims who call themselves Shiites (from *Shi'ah*, a word that means a following or a sect). The Shiites claim that the Prophet Muhammad chose his cousin and **Left** Muslims from Saudi Arabia. This is a Sunnite Country where Muslims follow the path shown by Muhammad as it is recorded in the *Sunna*.



Ayatollah Khomeini, who is the head of the Shiite fundamentalist party in Iran.

son-in-law, Ali, as his successor before he died, and that he and his descendants are therefore the natural successors as leaders of the Ummah—community—and the Islamic state. This is denied by the Sunnites, who point out that there is no written record of this, whereas they argue that the *Hadith* and the *Sunna* deal with all other principles of Islam.

There have been other breakaway groups over the years, which have so distorted the concept of pure Islam that they would not be accepted as Muslim by the Sunnite majority.



Art and Architecture

After Muhammad left Mecca, a distinctive style of architecture and certain designs and motifs became associated with Islam. There is a uniformity about Islamic art that makes it very different from traditional Western art, which has many distinctive styles, associated with different periods in its history.

Representation of the human or animal figure is forbidden in Muslim art (although this is not always strictly observed), to ensure that there is no risk of worshipping "graven images," so artists have used elaborate designs

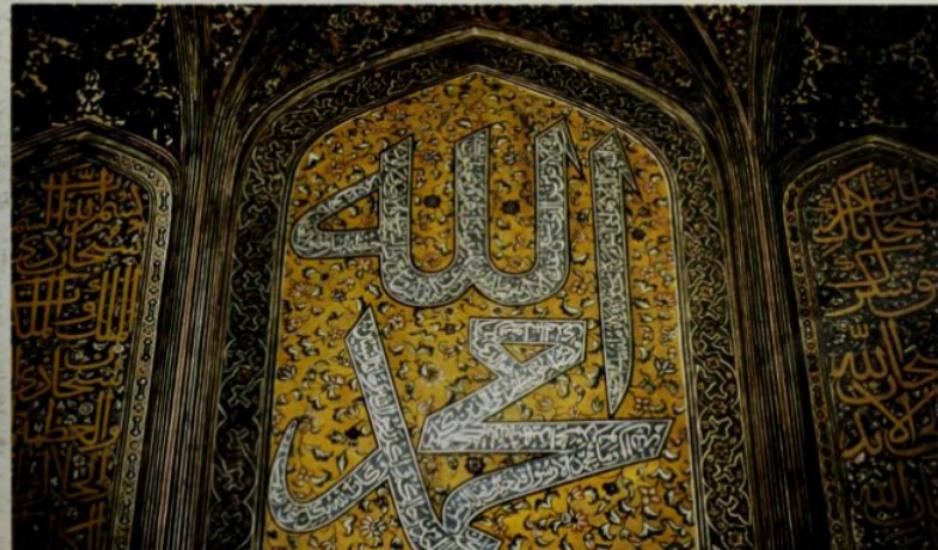
Left Muslim artists decorate their mosques with flowers, script and geometric designs. The human figure must not be drawn.

of flowers, leaves, geometrical patterns and calligraphy.

Calligraphy

The fact that the Koran was written in Arabic meant that the Arabic script was adopted over a wide area, stretching from India to Spain, and that most Muslims had some knowledge of it. The art of writing — calligraphy — is perhaps the most characteristic feature of Islamic art. Verses of the Koran in flowing Arabic script are the only form of decoration permitted in mosques, and they provide inspiration to the faithful while offering no distraction to lead their minds away from Allah.

Below Calligraphy frequently provides decoration for the walls of the mosques. This writing says "Allah" and "Muhammad."





Mosques

The most characteristic example of Islamic architecture is the mosque. The first mosque was built by Muhammad and his followers in Medina, but perhaps the most famous, and one of the most beautiful is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built in 691. It is built over the place where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son Ishmael to God and the place from where traditionally, Muhammad ascended into Heaven on a fiery horse. This mosque and the Al-Aqsa mosque

The Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem, was built in 691 over the place from where Muhammad ascended into Heaven on a fiery horse.

are considered by Muslims to be next in importance to Mecca and Medina as holy places.

The mosque of Ibn Tulun and the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, the Great Mosque in Delhi, the mosque at Cordoba and the Alhambra palace in Granada in Spain, are all buildings that are known and admired throughout the world.

Gardens

The Alhambra palace has gardens that were created by Arab gardeners. Gardens are important to Muslims, maybe because Paradise was a garden that Allah promised to the faithful. Water is always a significant feature. The traditional Muslim garden has two streams crossing it at right angles, representing the rivers of Paradise and should be so designed that it pleases all the senses with sweet-smelling flowers, fruit, trees, fountains, etc.

A similitude of the garden which those who keep their duty to Allah are promised. Therein are rivers of water unpolluted . . .

Sura XLVII, Muhammad

Other Crafts

Perhaps the best known example of Islamic art in the West is the famous Persian rug or carpet. There are no



This coppersmith like other Islamic craftsmen, is very skilled.

pews in a mosque: instead the floor is covered with carpets and rugs, and Muslims have prayer mats and rugs at home on which to kneel and pray.

Islamic craftsmen have excelled in work of all kinds, including metalwork, pottery, textiles and glassware.

The beautiful gardens of the Alhambra palace in Spain.



Islam and Science

In the *Hadith* it is written:

The Muslim should seek for knowledge from the cradle to the grave.

In the Koran we read that:

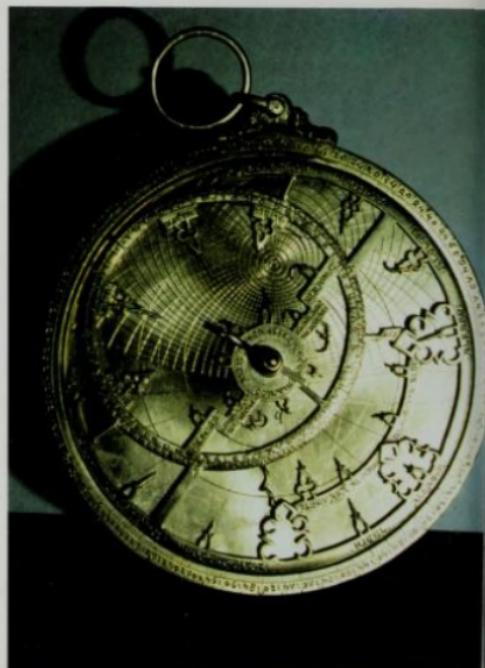
And whosoever is given knowledge is given indeed abundant wealth.

Sura II, the Cow

The search of knowledge inspired by the Koran and Muhammad led to some very important contributions to the world of science, especially mathematics. So-called Arabic numerals, the concept of zero as a number, and a basic decimal system had originated with the Hindus in India. Muslim scholars, in contact with India, developed these concepts to a high degree. Muslim scholars also translated great numbers of classic Greek works of mathematics, and they made many original contributions in the fields of arithmetic and especially algebra.

Some of the most important work of Arab scholars was in the field of astronomy, and several of their ideas were used later by scientists of the stature of Copernicus and Galileo. In addition, a considerable debt is owed to the Muslim scholars who carried out research in the fields of medicine, geography, navigation and botany.

Throughout the Middle Ages,



The astrolabe was used by Muslim navigators to measure the height of the stars and planets. It proved invaluable to early navigators.

Muslim universities were farther advanced than those in Christendom. The Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo housed the university in 970, and there were about twelve thousand students. The quest for knowledge continues and vast sums of money have been invested in education in recent years. Rich Muslim countries offer places to students from poorer ones.

Islam – A Way of Life

The Koran contains detailed instructions as to how a Muslim should run his or her life. Guidance is given on all matters from washing, eating and the management of business affairs to how a person's estate should be disposed of upon his or her death. The law contained in the Koran is known as the *Shariah* law and many Muslim countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, base their entire constitution on this.

There are rules for conduct in business that the non-Muslim would consider impractical. For instance, the

forbidding of usury means that no interest may be charged on loans, or obtained by placing money on deposit as in the banking systems of the West. Nevertheless, businesses work very satisfactorily under Islamic law and the feelings of trust and confidence that the system gives are much appreciated by its followers. Profit, of course, may be made, and honest trade is encouraged in the Koran, but the percentage of profit should always be declared, if requested.

Wudu, which is a ritual washing, must take place before prayers can be said. Here Muslims wash their feet.





The family and the running of its affairs is given much attention in the Koran and also in the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings and the instructions of Muhammed, which are intended to help Muslims understand some of the finer points of behavior. "Honor thy father and thy mother . . ." is a commandment very familiar to all Muslims:

The Lord hath decreed that ye worship none save him and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them, or both of them attain old age with thee, say not Fie unto them nor repulse them but speak unto them a gracious word.

Sura XVII, the Children of Israel

An animal is blessed before it is sacrificed. Only then it is halal, which means permissible to eat.

In Muslim communities families stay together. The son, when he marries, brings his new wife into his father's house and, if necessary, it will be made larger.

Muslims are instructed by the Koran to eat only *halal* meat (meat that is pure and cleansed; it refers to the meat of an animal that has been blessed before it is killed). This involves offering prayers over the animal and cutting its throat to drain

the blood from its body, while saying "*B'ism Allah*," which means "In the name of God." Many Muslims, especially those who live in strict communities, have a reluctance to eat meat unless they can be sure it is *halal*. The Muslim is also forbidden to eat any kind of pork, such as ham or bacon.

Even the manner of greeting one another is set out. The traditional greeting of one Muslim to another is:

Assalaam a'alaikum — "The Peace be upon you"

to which the reply is:

Wa a'alaikum assalaam — "And upon you the Peace"

There is an interesting code of use that goes with this greeting. The first person to speak will be:

1. The person entering a room addressing those inside.
2. The junior to the senior.
3. The rider to the walker.
4. The walker to the one standing.
5. The one standing to the one who is sitting.

Muslims greeting each other during the Eid al-Fitr festivals.



Women in Islam

All Islamic teaching emphasizes that women are the equals of men, although, in keeping with the Koran's instruction, in strict Muslim societies there is no mingling of the sexes in public and outside the family. This prevents sexuality's being used for casual enjoyment, which would only lead to exploitation of women. Hence the custom of veiling in public:

*And tell the believing women to lower their gaze
and be modest and to . . . draw their veils . . .
and not to reveal their adornment save to their
own husbands.*

Sura XXIV, Light

This explains also the formation of the *harem* where the women gather together. Women have equal rights but different responsibilities. They have the right to own property and to be educated, but Muslims have always considered that care of the home and the children should be a woman's chief concern. Women are allowed to work outside the home if it does not interfere with their responsibilities there.

Western society has many mistaken ideas about the position of women in Islam. It is impossible to generalize on this issue because some countries, for example Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan tend to be more strict than others, like Indonesia, which are far more relaxed. In fundamentalist Iran



In strict Muslim society men meet socially away from the women.

under the Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, women have to wear the *chador* — a long black gown — except when at work. But many Iranian women readily adopted it and were eager to return to traditional ways.

In Saudi Arabia, no woman is allowed to drive a car, and women must go veiled in public, yet more and more women are getting degrees at Saudi universities, and going to work as doctors, nurses, and teachers. There is even a bank run and staffed by women for women, to deal with the financial affairs of the many who are involved in business, which is

permitted under *Shariah Law*. It is said that half of the property in Jidda, one of the country's larger cities, is owned by women!

In the secular Muslim states like Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia, women

Muslim women in some Islamic countries wear a long black gown, and they are often veiled.



have become ambassadors and government ministers. But at the moment, there is a new wave of fundamentalism. New proposals have been brought before the Egyptian parliament which, if they were made law, would seriously reduce women's rights. These proposals have been made to satisfy the country's fundamentalists but they have raised protests.

Some women have no difficulty in reconciling the claims of family and the

independence gained by going out to work. Other women positively prefer the traditional role, giving service in exchange for protection. Still others are doubtful about what they see as a loss of freedom and a limiting of rights.

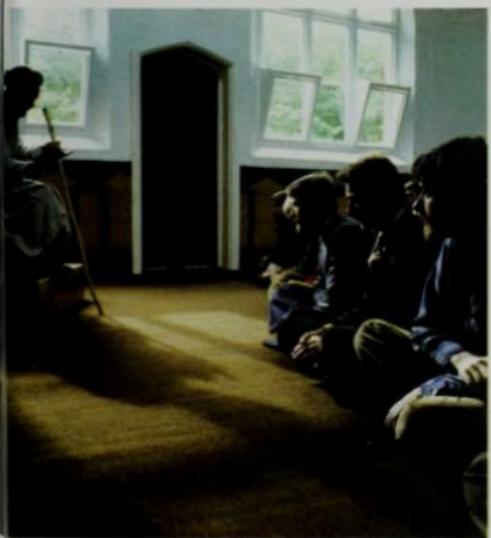
A female Muslim student learns carpentry at Baghdad Technical College. Many Muslim women decide to follow a career. Many have become successful in the fields of medicine, banking, politics and diplomacy.



Islam: Present and Future

After rapid expansion for several hundred years, Islam suffered a period of decline. Recent years, however, have seen a revival, and Islam is growing again at an impressive rate. At least one thousand people a day throughout the world embrace Islam. For over a decade it has been the world's fastest growing major religion, as confirmed by UNESCO.

An English imam reads the Friday message to a mainly Western congregation. There are an increasing number of converts in the West.



This growth is not restricted to traditional areas like Central Africa (where, in the past fifteen years, fifty million black Africans have embraced Islam), but the West also has seen a tremendous increase in converts. In the United States there are more than two million Muslims. One in five of all Muslims in the world lives in the U.S.S.R.

The establishment of the Shi'ite fundamentalist rule in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini seemed to mark a revival of the basic teachings of Islam, which some felt had been corrupted by Western lifestyles. There is no denying that there is some degree of fundamentalist thinking in Iran. Women, for example, have to go veiled again and wear the *chador*, and are imprisoned if they refuse to obey these instructions. Although Iran is an extreme case, fundamentalist thinking means a return to basic Islamic doctrine and the *Shariah* Law in every Muslim country.

The Muslim world is disturbed by the Gulf War, that bitter conflict between Iran and Iraq.

Israel is another troubled area, as Muslim countries differ in their attitude toward the new State. Some are hostile, but others, like Egypt, are more tolerant. Although Islam is not a politically united bloc, Muslims are agreed over the issue of the Holy City of Jerusalem. For Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem is a sacred city.

For Islam it is the third most holy city after Mecca and Medina, and home of the beautiful Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques. The Islamic world was shocked when Israel, having occupied the Arab sector of Jerusalem at the end of the Arab-Israeli war in 1973, declared in 1980 that Jerusalem should be the capital of the Jewish State forever. At an Islamic conference

held in 1981 in Saudi Arabia and attended by forty-two Islamic rulers, this declaration was met with unanimous opposition.

Jerusalem, which is the Holy City for the followers of the three major religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam. On the far right of this photograph, you can see the Dome of the Rock mosque.





New mosques are being built to meet the ever-increasing demand. This mosque is being built in Jidda, one of the main commercial cities of Saudi Arabia.

Glossary

Allah The Muslim name for God

Arkan al-din The Pillars of Islam, five in all, which must be observed by all Muslims. These are: the *shahadah*; the *salat*; the *zakat*; *Ramadhan* and the *hajj*.

Caliph "Successor." At first it referred to the successor of Muhammad, Abu Bakr, but later was the title for the head of the Muslim State.

Chador The outer garment of the women of Iran, consisting of a long, draped cloth covering the head and body.

Eid al-Adha The Festival of Sacrifice occurring at the time of the *Hajj*.

Eid al-Fitr The Festival of Fast-Breaking at the conclusion of *Ramadhan*.

Fiqh The Islamic system of law.

Fundamentalism The strict adherence to every word of the Koran and *Sharia* Law.

Gospels The first four books of the New Testament of the bible, which describe the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Hadith The sayings of the Prophet, often referred to as "The Traditions," were recorded by his friends and observers.

Hajj "Effort." It is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is compulsory for every Muslim who has the means to perform the journey once in a lifetime.

Halal That which is permissible in Islamic law.

Harem "Sanctuary." A term used to denote the environs of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Also used for a place where women can gather.

Hegira The migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the year 622, heralding the foundation of the

Islamic society and state. The Muslim calendar begins with this event and is denoted by the letters AH (Anno Hegirae) written after the Islamic date.

Ihram Two lengths of white cotton worn by pilgrims undertaking the Hajj; also the state of ritual purity of pilgrims wearing this clothing.

Ka'aba The shrine in the second mosque in Mecca.

Koran "Reading." The divinely revealed scripture of Islam.

Muwahadeen Unitarianism. The desire that all Muslims should adhere strictly to the word of the Koran and not divide into sects.

Ramadhan "The month of the heat." The ninth month of the Islamic Calendar, and the Islamic month of fasting, when food and drink, including water and medicine, are forbidden between dawn and sunset. Pregnant women and sick people are excused.

Shariah "Path." The code of life of Islam, based on the Koran and the Prophet's *Sunna*.

Shiites Those Muslims who adhere to the principle of succession to the leadership of the Muslim community through the descendants of Ali and Fatimah.

Sunna The actions or practice of the Prophet, consisting of what he himself did, recommended or approved of in others.

Sura A chapter of the Koran. Each *sura* has a name, deriving from the beginning or matter included in the text.

Torah The first five books of the Old Testament and the foundation of the Jewish tradition and law.

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ISLAM

There are followers of Islam (Muslims) in almost every country in the world. They are united by their belief in Allah, the one God, whose word was revealed to Muhammad, the Prophet, and preserved in the Koran. This book sets out to show that Islam is a dignified and logical way of life, not only a belief. It considers its origins, its growth and the observance of the five "Arkan" or Pillars of faith and attempts to give a balanced and easily understandable view of its place in the world today.